

LP

F

5012

1863

S9



3 9004 01461651 7

359

THE
RESURRECTION OF THE BODY:
A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE 4TH OF NOVEMBER, 1863, BEING THE DAY

OF THE
FUNERAL OF CATHERINE McNAUGHTON,

WIFE OF COLLIN McFEE, Esq., BEAUHARNOIS.

BY THE REV. F. P. SYM,
(Minister of St. Edward's Church, Beauharnois.)

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

MONTREAL:
PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL, ST. NICHOLAS STREET.
1863.

S E R M O N.

" So also is the resurrection of the body. It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour ; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body ; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."—*1 Cor. 15th, 42nd, 44th.*

Among the many consolations which the gospel presents to the Christian, either in the prospect of his own dissolution or when death has bereaved him of one beloved, the certainty of their continued existence and well-being is the sweetest. To be assured that our departed friends are still alive ; that they have survived the shock of death in all the consciousness of individual being ; that though the body is subjected to utter decay, the spirit, the nobler part, survives unhurt, retains all its former recollections and sympathies, and may still participate in ours ;—to be assured of all this, brings delightful solace to us in the sad hour of bereavement. Our tears indeed may continue to flow at the separation ; but faith follows the departed, and teaches us to think of them only as absent. True, we know little of the unknown land whither they have gone ; nothing of its sun and its sky, and its scenery, nor of its spiritual inhabitants, nor their manner of converse, nor their special employments. But this we do know, that the Saviour who died for them is there ; that multitudes who have inhabited this globe of ours, now redeemed out of every nation and kindred and tongue, are there ; that many who have gone with us to the house of God in company, worshipped in the same sanctuary, and knelt around the same domestic altar, are there. Separated

from *us*, they are united to others as dear to them, with whom, throughout eternity, they shall enjoy a purer and a happier fellowship than this world ever afforded to the most fortunate.

It is natural for us thus to follow the spirits of the departed, not only because the spirit is the nobler part, but because it still survives unchanged, or rather elevated in the scale of being and enjoyment. But while thus in faith and hope, we follow the spirit into the world unseen, let us not overlook the body, which we have hidden from our sight in the grave, as a thing perished, to be seen no more. Let us even follow it there, that we may meditate on the delightful contrasts presented in the text.

The words consist of two parts : a series of facts regarding the natural body palpable to observation ; and a series of facts regarding the spiritual body revealed to faith :—the one series is a counterpart of the other.

I.—Consider the series of facts regarding the natural body palpable to observation.

1. “ It is sown in *corruption*. ” Death feeds upon it, and it is consumed. So soon as the soul has left it, and the vital principle is extinct, putrefaction commences, and it begins to dissolve into its original elements. Vast indeed are the changes now apparent in it. The rosy color of youth and health has given place to the lividness of corruption ; the eye, lately bright with meaning and affection, is lustreless and shrunk ; the well turned and graceful form gives evidence of the devastation that is going on ; and after a few days we are glad to hurry away from the sight of living men that form which was once beheld with fondness and admiration ; and ere we take the last look of it, it is disagreeably manifest to every sense—that it is sown in corruption.

Nor would we shock the feelings of humanity by uncovering the grave to observe what desolating process is going on

there. Let us not presume to look at the humiliating remnant of mortality while a vestige of it is discoverable. But return you may, after the lapse of years, to the place where it was deposited. Look on the upturned mould, and you discover not a fragment of the ruin of that body which was fearfully and wonderfully made ; and when you look upon the dust, which bears no evidence that it ever lived or even composed any part of a structure like your own, you may take up the words of the text, and say, "*it is sown in corruption.*"

2. But "*it is also sown in dishonour,*" in sad and shameful dishonour. Observe that fair one arresting every eye amidst the gay assemblage. All are proud to offer the most respectful homage. Her very presence awakens a feeling of affectionate veneration, and even makes the observer think more worthily of his kind. But let disease and death pass their withering finger over this object of general admiration, and ah, how vast the change ! Those who lately admired would shrink and tremble to look upon the object of their former homage ;—they bear it away in close concealment to the sepulchre ; and lowering it down amidst damp and darkness and worms, they leave it alone unguarded, to be trodden over by all who may, a cast out thing, which is sown in dishonor." Its epitaph is the epitaph of our race :

" How loved, how honored once, avails thee not :
To whom related or by whom begot.
A heap of dust alone remains of thee ;
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be."

Nor does any one escape this general doom. The deformed and the beautiful, the peasant and the prince, are in death reduced to the same level. The prince indeed may be attended to his last resting-place with much outward pomp, but soon the meanest of his followers retire and leave him to rot as dishonorably as the menial that waited on him. Even the fondest affection soon ceases to look the way where the

mortal part of the most beloved is interred. The gravestone scarce attracts the notice of a neighbour or acquaintance, and even this frail memorial is at length defaced. A new generation cannot tell who is below ; and the mortal remains of the beautiful, the high-born, the beloved, are equally sown in dishonor.

3. "It is sown in *weakness*." How melancholy that weakness which approaching death brings on, whether arising from violence, disease, or age. The strong man who once felt as if his sinews were made of iron, then totters in the feebleness of infancy ; and he who once toiled and travelled without feeling weariness or perceiving distance, cannot walk across his own chamber. His limbs are incapable of performing their accustomed office ; his hands lie powerless by his side ; his eyes scarce move in recognition of the friend who moistens his parched lips ; his lungs at length cease to breathe, and his heart to beat, and life's fitful fever is closed, —the body is sown in weakness and consigned to corruption.

4. The apostle sums up the circumstances of man's mortality, by the fact that "it is sown a *natural body*." It is consigned to the grave with the same properties as any other piece of inanimate matter. It differs not from the leaf that has fallen from the tree ; from the carcase of the animal that lived and died in the forest. It is subject to the same processes of decomposition and decay which are universal throughout nature. The more exquisite symmetry of its parts, and the higher dignity of its rank, does not deliver it from the law of corruption when once the soul is dislodged from it. Sown a natural body, it is subject to that decay and dissolution which sooner or later changes the form of every individual substance which the earth contains.

These facts are indeed most humbling to the pride of man. True, the death of the body does not essentially affect the soul ; the immortal part is left untouched and undishonored. But body and soul are "*a fond couple*," closely linked to-

gether, and it is humiliating that the spoiler should riot on so intimate a companion, and utterly destroy it. But blessed be God, even this inferior part of our nature shall not be left in irrecoverable degradation. God will redeem it from the power of the grave ; “ for the sea shall give up the dead which are in it, and *death* and hell shall give up the dead which are in them ; then that which is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption ; that which is sown in dishonor shall be raised in glory ; that which is sown in weakness shall be raised in power ; that which is sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body.”

II.—This introduces us to the series of facts regarding *the spiritual body*, which are revealed to faith.

The same body which is sown shall be raised. Not perhaps consisting of exactly the same material particles, for this is not essential to the case, since these are every day cast off and reproduced without destroying its identity.

But whatever is essential to the identity of any individual body will be preserved by Him who watches over the dust of his saints, and who has promised in the morning of the resurrection to fashion them like unto Christ’s glorious body, by the mighty power wherewith he is able to subdue even all things unto himself. We may not doubt that almighty power is in this, and every instance, competent to perform what has been promised. And surely there is less mystery in the fact of the resurrection of our bodies than in the creation of the world out of nothing ; and surely there is nothing more mysterious in it than in preserving in an imperceptible seed the essential parts of that plant which in summer delighted the eye, and from which, after the desolation of winter is past, it shall be raised up again in all its former beauty. Resting contented however on this subject with the simple declaration of God, and receiving the resurrection of the body as a fact revealed to faith, let us contemplate the sur-

passing excellence of the body in which the saints of God shall be raised.

1.—“It shall be raised in incorruption :” not liable like the natural body to decay and dissolution, it shall abide in perpetual youth and vigor. Partaking of the eternal permanency of the heavenly world, the body will be as incorruptible as the soul is immortal. How infinitely superior to our present condition ; how much more worthy of a regenerated being ! Here corruption often seizes the infant at its very entrance upon life, and it invades us at last in age as an unavoidable event. But in the new condition of our being there shall be no more death. “This corruptible shall have put on incorruption ; this mortal shall have put on immortality.”

2.—It is raised from its dishonour into “glory.” The precise nature of this glory we cannot now comprehend ; for we know not of what refinement and lustre these material bodies are capable when the hand of God shall have refashioned them in the morning of the resurrection. We have seen the body only in the grosser form adapted to earth, and even that impaired by the ravages of sin, and the law of corruption. No man who looks upon a lump of earth, would imagine that any power could fashion it into a human being ; no more are we able to conjecture by looking upon our present bodies to what a height of glory divine power may raise them. “Brethren,” “says the apostle,” it does not yet appear what we shall be : but this we know, that when he shall appear *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is.” And this likeness takes in the body as well as the soul ; both shall resemble Jesus in his glorified humanity. What a body was that which on the Mount of Transfiguration did shine above the brightness of the sun ! which, after his resurrection moved with the ease and expedition of thought ! which appeared to Saul at noon-day above the brightness of the sun !—that body in which Christ is now worshipped by all the angels of God ; in which he will judge the world, and

reign forever in his kingdom. With such a glorified body in his degree will the believer be raised. "For we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body ; according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself."

3.—In the resurrection the body shall be raised "*in power.*" In its most vigorous state in this life it is full of weakness. A small degree of labor exhausts it. It requires to be steadily refreshed by long periods of rest and insensibility. Most persons consume one-third of their time in sleep alone : and the remaining two-thirds must be subdivided by numerous intervals of repose. Our constitution requires this because of its weakness. But when raised in the power of its new being, it will not need such seasons of rest and sleep. Ever vigilant and active, it will be prepared to dwell in that world where "*there is no night.*" In its acts of worship there will be no interruption, for the heavenly worshippers serve God day and night in his temple ; and, if commissioned on errands of obedience, it will speed its way without fatigue through immeasurable space, and accomplish tasks which no combination of mere human power could achieve.

4.—This will further appear from the last fact revealed to faith of the resurrection. It is raised "*a spiritual body,*" *not in its essence*, for that will remain as it is now, and be material. But it will be refined from all the grossness of materiality. Its appetites will be extinguished. It will be the proper companion and instrument of the soul in its glorified condition, endued with organs of sense suited to its new sphere ; all will be instinct with heavenly intelligence and love, inlets to the soul of those rivers of pleasure that flow from before the throne of God.

In offering this brief illustration of the facts revealed to faith, we do not forget that we are treading upon the mysteries of the invisible world, on which our knowledge is speedily

exhausted. The very names in which that limited knowledge is conveyed, express only relative ideas, and can only be understood proportionable to our present knowledge and experience. And when we discourse on a mode of existence dissimilar to our own, and of which we have no actual knowledge, we are in danger of substituting our own conjectures for truth. We pass away, then, from the mysterious but consolatory facts which we have now contemplated, that we may offer one or two practical reflections.

1.—The facts then presented in the text call for our warmest gratitude, as evidence of the completeness of that redemption which Christ hath wrought out for those who believe. It would have been a deliverance of unspeakable value had the soul alone been delivered from the destroyer. But when we see our deliverer so intent upon the completion of his work, as not to leave even the body under that degradation to which sin has subjected it, our admiration of his love and power become the more unbounded. When we hear the conqueror exclaim—"I will ransom thee from the power of the grave ; I will redeem thee from death ; O death, I will be thy plague ; O grave, I will be thy destruction ;"—our confidence in him who is so mighty to save, and so strong to deliver, becomes the more firmly established, and we wait with a brighter hope for the redemption of the body.

2.—Again ; this subject affords consolation when death has bereaved us of one beloved. "I would not have you to be ignorant brethren," says the apostle, "concerning them that asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that *Jesus* died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him." Departed believers will not only be found again by the sorrowing believers left behind : they have already made a happy exchange as to the immortal part, and even their flesh, long burdened it may be with disease and pain, is resting in hope. How soothing and delightful this assurance when we

are committing to the dust the remains of one with whose fellowship the happiness of our own being seemed inseparably connected ! As we look upon the place which they occupied, now empty, and find them neither in the chamber nor at the table : and when they come not at the quiet hour of evening to join in our devotions, we feel—painfully feel—the severity of the separation. Yet let us not be disconsolate ; other thoughts and hopes come in to assuage our grief. They live : they have entered indeed into another mansion of our Father's house ; and we shall not see them for a short space ; but having fallen asleep in Jesus, we are assured of their well-being, and look forward in joyful anticipation of meeting them again. And if our thoughts turn for a moment to the body which has made the grave its house, and its bed in darkness,—“ saying to corruption thou art my father ; and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister,”—we look upon it not as a thing perished, but as a wearied and afflicted sufferer taking rest—a rest from which in the morning of the resurrection, *it* shall arise incorruptible, and will be seen in a far sublimer and far lovelier form than that in which they have sojourned in this lower world : and we shall join them amid the new-born glories to which all believers shall then be raised ; and we shall never be separated from them any more for ever. “ Wherefore, brethren, comfort one another with these words.” How seasonable, my friends, is all this doctrine to our minds at the present moment ! How applicable to our case under the pressure of that mournful dispensation with which we have been visited ! And how richly and how effectually should it contribute to our support and consolation ! The loss which we have sustained has created a void in the family, and among her friends in the church, which we cannot get well supplied. She who has been taken from us occupied a place in our esteem, and confidence, and regard, down to her very latest days, which nothing but sterling worth could have enabled her either to acquire at first, or afterwards to maintain. And

we may safely affirm, that among those who knew how to appreciate what is truly great and good, there seldom was one, wherever she was known, more highly and sincerely esteemed while she lived, or more deeply and deservedly lamented when she died. To give any suitable description of her then is a task for which I am not adequate. I knew her well indeed, being privileged with her friendship for many years. But my very knowledge of her satisfies me that I cannot do justice to her memory. I cannot speak of her as her peculiar merits deserve. I cannot speak of her as the feelings of my own heart would desire. This, however, I regret the less, as her life and character must be so familiar to the minds of many of you, and so strongly and distinctly impressed upon them, as to require from me no illustration to make you either know or understand it. There was nothing hidden or disguised or equivocal about it. It was pure, gentle, kind, a good word for all, and an uncharitable thought for none. There was a consistency in her mode of speaking and of acting which could not fail to command admiration. And, indeed, in the endeared respect with which many of you have regarded her, and in the silent but deep-felt sorrow which at this moment fills your bosoms, there are ample proofs that you are no strangers to all that high excellency by which she was so conspicuously distinguished. Into the domestic circle I must not venture, sacred at this moment by the depth and freshness of its sorrows—and tell you how much she loved there and how much she was beloved. But I may speak of her as a friend ; and how many can bear witness to me when I say that her friendship was invaluable. It was warm, it was disinterested, it was liberal, it was unostentatious, it was unwavering and constant. And they who enjoyed it enjoyed a treasure, for there was both the willingness and the ability to give them the most substantial tokens of her favor and regard, and never for a moment was her temper soured or her kindness chilled. I may speak of her

as a Christian, and she was sincere. Those who knew her best, can best give witness how faithfully and habitually she embodied her knowledge, and her principles, and her hope as a Christian, into her life and deportment, her daily walk and conversation. I firmly believe she was a Christian in heart and habit, in sentiment and conduct, through the whole of life. No one knows better than myself, except the partner of her joys and cares, how conscientious and faithful and earnest, she was in the discharge of her spiritual duties, how active and assiduous in the care of her family, in giving counsel to its members, and in doing good to all with unaffected kindness, as she had opportunity. To act in all things on principle, and that of the highest and purest description, appeared to be her constant aim; and, judging from her conduct, this which formed her aim, was in no common degree her attainment. How pleasing, then, to me, to say unto you all, *here* is a character worthy of imitation, exhibiting the virtues and graces of the Christian life. Never was minister favored with a more faithful friend or a more devoted member of his church, and to her frequently have I been indebted for any encouragement that I have received in the labors of my office, and which is so highly prized by every minister of the gospel. She was an ornament to my church, a most exemplary member of my flock—one, whose place in the house of prayer was never empty, unless prevented by the Providence of God. Oh, brethren, how many are there, who now hear me, of whom the same could be said when you come to die. Remember that a well-spent life brings its own reward, “for the memory of the just is blessed.” Her sickness was short—disease came insidiously upon her, and quickly prostrated every power of mind and body. It was of little avail that we invited the sleeper to unite with us at a throne of grace; the torpor of disease was too deep to permit even a momentary consciousness; the ear could no longer distinguish as it had been wont the accents of divine love: faith had lost

its vision in the dark cloud, and hope had powerlessly folded up her wings until the hour of deliverance. But, nevertheless, faith and hope were *there within the cloud*, as the humble and unobtrusive piety of her past life had given us the token, and we doubt not they have now obtained their fruition before the throne of God.

How comfortable and reviving then is this *truth*, that the body which we commit to the dust, shall be restored to life again, that this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, under all the trials and afflictions of the present state ! Who that properly understands and believes it, but must reckon with the apostle, “ that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. In what glowing colors do the sacred scriptures describe the happiness of believers at the great day of Christ’s appearing, when the last trumpet shall sound, when the dead shall be raised from their graves, and their vile bodies shall be fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body—when these two intimate companions, the soul and body, shall be joined together again in immortal union, and the redeemed of the Lord in their complete natures shall take possession of the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world. Such are the cheering hopes which the gospel inspires ; such the animating prospects of immortality, and how admirably fitted, when cordially believed, to soothe the soul in its deepest sorrow ! But the gospel which informs us that the souls of the righteous do at death immediately pass into glory, that is, into a state of inconceivable bliss—into the society of angels and spirits of just men made perfect, into the immediate presence of God and the Redeemer—likewise declares that the souls of the wicked shall descend into the prison of hell, into the company of devils and wicked spirits like themselves, there to await their final and everlasting doom. They too shall be raised incorruptible, though not in glory. They too shall be raised in power ; but that power shall only

be the capacity of endurance. They too shall be raised spiritual bodies; but they shall not bear the image of the heavenly. Of those that sleep in the dust, some shall awake to everlasting life; but some also to shame and everlasting contempt. This last shall be the fate of the wicked. Death, therefore, to them will not be gain, since it fixes their doom irreversibly in moral degradation, and its proper punishment. Be it now your daily concern, my brethren, to scrutinize the ground of your hope, lest you should cherish a delusion that shall make you ashamed at last. “For not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but they that do the will of our Father who is in heaven.” It is a dreadful infatuation to dream that a life of ungodliness and carelessness may yet terminate in a happy death and a blissful eternity! It is contrary to the express declaration of God, and to the established order of his moral government. Reflect, that the doom of mortality was pronounced upon you at the moment of your birth; swift-winged time is speeding onward with your death warrant; a few more revolutions of the year and your career will be closed! Remember that your eternity will take its complexion from time. “Whosoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Soon shall you reach the end of your journey never to retrace your steps on this lower world. Let all your plans then be laid with eternity clearly in view. Let each day be improved, as it hastens to join the past of your existence—charge it with some joyous message of sin subdued, of faith strengthened, to the world of the departed, that the spirits of the redeemed may rejoice in your heavenward progress. Strive to redeem more earnestly the fleeting moments for the service of God, for the cultivation of holiness, for the development of Christian character, that thus you may become prepared for being made a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Seek those things which shall lastingly bene-

fit yourselves and others ; and leave behind you, when you depart from earth, an example of faith, zeal and patience, which may stimulate others in their efforts to attain Christian excellence. O that we all had the wisdom so to live, as that a few years might convey us to a world of bliss, and when the account is taken, none of us may be lost. What heart, rightly affected by a view of eternity, can contemplate without deep emotion the possible separation for ever of those who now listen to the same gospel—sit in the same seats—and stand in the closest of earthly relations to each other ; yet, alas, brethren, this is not merely possible, but probable, unless we awake to new earnestness and concern for ourselves and for each other. Be persuaded, then, to look forward a little way, that you may see how short a course of worldly enjoyment is, and how darkly and wretchedly it must terminate ! Then cast your eye upon the path along which the justified sinner is pursuing his way. It looks to you, perhaps, who have no relish for his peculiar pleasures, as if it lay through a dreary wilderness, and so it often is. But amidst all the sorrows and difficulties of that wilderness, he has the favor of a forgiving and reconciled God to uphold and cheer him, to be his pillar of cloud by day and his pillar of fire by night, to fill him with a peace, which the world can neither give nor take away. The Christian's journey is as short and as checkered as the sinner's, but how differently does it terminate. It terminates in a land of rest, and bliss, and glory ; where the joy that he now feels in the sense of God's pardoning mercy shall be freed from all that impairs it here. And in the morning of the resurrection, it will be rendered complete by his reunion to a glorified and spiritual body. “ And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.”

Amen.

